



Is the SARC Fulfilling Its Intended Purpose?

On November 17, 2005, California Department of Education (CDE) staff delivered a School Accountability Report Card (SARC)-related presentation at the annual California Educational Research Association conference held in Long Beach, California. Titled *Is the SARC Fulfilling Its Intended Purpose?*, the presentation was prepared to solicit feedback about the usefulness of the SARC and generate ideas for future efforts to improve the SARC.

The presentation was motivated by the cumulative impact of legislative expansions of the SARC reporting elements over the past several years, recent concerns about school report card clarity, recent media attention about compliance issues, and increasing concerns about the burdens faced by LEAs in preparing and publishing annual school report cards.

In addition to providing brief background about the history and purpose of the SARC, the presentation included a group discussion in response to the following questions:

- How has your district distributed the SARC?
- What is the level of understanding of the SARC data elements by

parents and the school community?

- How frequently do LEAs and schools field questions about SARC reporting elements?
- Which SARC reporting elements are most relevant, least relevant, most requested, and least requested?
- What are your most significant challenges with regard to the SARC?
- How burdensome are the SARC preparation and distribution requirements?
- Has the SARC moved beyond its original intent?
- How could the SARC be improved so that it could fulfill its intended purpose more effectively?

The CDE welcomes your continuing feedback in response to these questions. You may provide such feedback by contacting us as indicated on page 3.

Effective Distribution of School Accountability Report Cards is Mandatory

State law generally encourages schools to make a concerted effort to notify parents of the purpose of the SARC.

Specifically, local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to notify all parents about the availability of the SARC and to provide parents with instructions about how the SARC can be obtained both through the Internet (if feasible) and on paper (by request). LEAs with access to the Internet are required to make SARCs available through that medium. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act also requires LEAs to make school accountability information widely available through such means as posting it on the Internet, distributing it to the media, and distributing it through public agencies.

When 15 percent or more of a school's enrolled students speak a single primary language other than English, state law requires that all notices, reports, statements, or records sent by the school or district to the parent or guardian of these students must, in addition to being written in English, be written in the appropriate primary language. In addition, federal law requires that schools and districts communicate effectively with all parents and guardians, regardless of the percent of students who speak a language other than English. *Please note that these provisions are applicable to the preparation and dissemination of SARCs.*

The following are suggested guidelines for posting a SARC on a district Web site:

- Establish a SARC link on the district's home page.
- Maintain a SARC page with links to each school's report card and other information (such as a link to the

CDE's SARC page) that parents and community members might find useful.

- Ensure that the SARCs can be easily found using a search engine or site index.

Education Code (EC) Section 33126 requires LEAs to provide the CDE with an accurate link to the Web site address where the LEA has posted its SARCs. *EC Section 33126* also requires the CDE to maintain a centralized set of links to these LEA Web sites to facilitate public access to SARCs. SARC coordinators are required to inform the CDE of the Web site address where the LEA's SARCs are located. To do so, please use the form located at [Update Your SARC Web Site Link](#) on the CDE's SARC Web site.

Study Finds Report Cards Difficult to Read and Understand

A report entitled *Grading the School Accountability Report Card: A Report on the Readability of the School Accountability Report Card*, which was recently published by the UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, concludes that the SARC is so difficult to read that it cannot be understood by parents and community members. The report recommends that the state should:

1. Draw upon outside expertise to assess the comprehensibility of the SARC.
2. Design, test, and publish a more comprehensible SARC template for use by school districts, based on a detailed study by and on

recommendations from experts in preparing such documents.

3. The state should require that the SARC be translated into languages used by significant groups within each school district's population.

The CDE is currently evaluating the report's conclusions and will in the near future develop a plan to simplify the wording used in the SARC template. Any resulting changes would affect the 2005-06 SARC template for report cards to be published in the 2006-07 school year.

SARC Question of the Month

The following is the "SARC Question of the Month" along with its answer:

Q. Can data in the SARC template be changed after the template is downloaded from the CDE Web site?

A. Yes. If particular data do not accurately reflect the data collected by the district and reported to the state, local educational agencies may change the data as part of preparing and publishing a school report card.

If you have questions or comments about the topics covered in this newsletter, or suggestions for topics for a future newsletter, please contact us as indicated below.

Contact Information:

Phone: 916-319-0875

E-mail: sarc@cde.ca.gov

Web site: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/>